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ABSTRACT

This study examined how kindergarten teachers' views of readiness (maturational, learning, or school) are influenced by students from urban, suburban, and rural areas; by minority and non-minority students; and by students from lower and middle class backgrounds. The framework for the study was the social constructivist theory, the theory that all knowledge is socially constructed by actors involved in a given situation. The study sample consisted of 1,339 kindergarten teachers from a sample of 860 schools across the country who responded to the "Public School Kindergarten Teachers' Views on Children's Readiness for School" questionnaire. The results indicated that views of readiness were influenced by social context. In urban, poor, and minority contexts, teachers rejected the school readiness view and the academic practices it advocates. Teachers in middle class, white, suburban schools leaned toward maturational views of readiness. The underlying commonality of these views is a rejection of the academic curriculum in kindergarten. The inner city teachers' views may lead to changing the curriculum to be more developmentally appropriate while the suburban teachers' views can lead to changing children by holding them back or placing them in a special readiness program. Middle class parents prepare their children for academic programs through challenging academic curricula, equating this with higher quality education, while inner city students may in fact receive better preschool education through programs such as Head Start. The findings suggest that the significant social context factors are the school building environments which determine whether kindergartens are viewed as formal public education programs or early childhood education programs. Based on the results, it is recommended that to reach the readiness goal is to enhance the link between developmentally appropriate preschool programs and public school kindergarten programs. (ND)

The Social Context of Readiness
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Introduction

As we move toward the year 2,000 we are consciously aware of the mandates set by the United States Governors in 1990. The charge for early childhood educators was to prepare all children for school. We have given increased attention to "readiness" at the levels of policy, research, and practice. However, we have not given much attention to defining "all children." As we move toward the year 2,000 we will also experience a demographic shift in our schools. The business world has begun to prepare for these changes, yet the same preparation is lacking in education. By the year 2,000 there will be more minority and poor children in our schools each bringing diverse backgrounds and needs. As educators and researchers we need to acknowledge this demographic shift when we are developing policy. We need to consider how our policy decisions and practices will impact this group of students. This study will examine kindergarten teachers' views of readiness. More specifically, I will examine how their views vary due to their different student populations. In doing so, I will examine the following research questions:

1. How are teachers' views of readiness (maturational, learning, or school) influenced by students from urban, suburban, and rural areas?
2. How are teachers' views of readiness influenced by minority and non-minority students?
3. How are teachers' views of readiness influenced by students from lower and middle class backgrounds?

In the research on readiness there are three views on how children develop. Maturationist believe children become ready for school through biological and physiological changes. Thus until these changes occur students

will not be ready to take full advantage of school (Gesell, 1925). Learning readiness theorists believe all children are born ready to learn (May & Campbell, 1981). They believe it is important to expose all children need to appropriate learning experiences based on their level of development. Lastly, school readiness theorists believe that children are ready for school when they meet the requirements and standards for the program (Bushell, 1987). In some cases, they have developed readiness objectives, such as counting to 20, knowing the alphabet, being able to write their name legibly (May & Campbell). This readiness definition is based on observable learning objectives (Bushell, 1982). In this study I will examine whether kindergarten teachers hold one of the three of readiness.

Theoretical framework

The framework for this study is the social constructivist theory. This theory states that all knowledge is socially constructed by the actors involved in a given situation (Minick, 1989). I will use this framework to explain how teachers in various social settings develop their views of readiness. This theory is rooted in Vygotsky's theory that states:

Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice. First, on the social level, and later on the individual level; first between people (interpsychological), and then inside the child (intrapsychological). This applies equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory, and to formation of concepts. All higher function originates as actual relations between human individuals.

Vygostky, 1978 p.57

Thus I expect that teachers will develop their views of readiness based on interactions with their students and later internalize these views. I also suspect that the social context variables, of race, socioeconomic status,

metropolitan status will have an indirect effect on teachers' views through their students' social characteristics. This study will examine socioeconomic status, metropolitan status will have an indirect effect on teachers' views through their students' characteristics. This study will examine the social construction of readiness on a national sample. Elizabeth Graue (1993) studied this phenomena in three teachers in three distinct communities: a working class and mixed ethnicity community; a middle class and primarily Anglo community; and a mixed class and mixed ethnicity community. In this study she was a participant in three kindergarten classrooms. She served as a teacher's aide to learn about the students, the classroom culture and to develop a relationship with the teachers. She recorded her observations and conducted interviews with a sample of parents, children, and teachers. She analyzed field notes and interview transcripts for themes and codes. "The coding, vignette and the thematic narrative were joined to create a case describing the construction of meaning of readiness for each setting." (p. 270) The results of the analyses revealed differences in readiness among the three kindergarten teachers. The teacher from the working class and mixed ethnicity community held learning and maturational beliefs about readiness. The teacher from the middle class and Anglo community held beliefs that were consistent with the school readiness view. Lastly, the teacher in the mixed class and race community held learning beliefs about readiness. Graue concludes that these differences in views are due to the differences that exist in each school setting, the communities, and the social actors.

In another study of kindergarten teachers' beliefs, Jipson (1991) examined teachers' opinions of developmentally appropriate practice. Jipson analyzed journals, philosophy statements, and narratives of 30

teachers enrolled in early childhood curriculum graduate seminar. In her analysis of the data she found that teachers were most vocal in critiquing the contextual dimension of developmentally appropriate practice. The students believed that choosing or developing standards of appropriate practice is dependent on the social environment. These decisions must take in account the social, political, and cultural context of the classroom. Jipson concluded that the social context is determined by the students' race, gender, and social class. Thus these are essential to teachers' beliefs and practices in the classroom.

The social factors of race, class, and gender are also essential to the social construction of the term "at-risk." Swedener (1995) discusses the construction of the "at-risk" label. Particularly how the construction of the term had an affect on the policies and practices targeted at the "at-risk" population. Some of the solutions were not in the best interest of children. Thus she warns others to understand the context in which terms are socially constructed. Hence if we want to ensure that all children begin school ready to learn. We have to analyze the social construction of the term in order to avoid repeating the same mistakes. In the next sections I provide descriptions of the social contexts present in this study.

In the following section I will review the literature on metropolitan status, race and socioeconomic status and discuss how it influences teachers' views of readiness and teaching practice. Metropolitan status is a factor that is often overlooked in discussions of diversity. However, metropolitan status is becoming increasingly important as we realize the influence of the community and social context on children's achievement. Metropolitan status is an indicator of the community of the child and school. In this study the urban, suburban, rural areas will be examined.

The urban community is perhaps the most diverse of the three areas. In large cities there are financial centers, city government, cultural centers, industry, and a variety of goods and services. Most cities have a very wealthy upwardly mobile population that work and live in the city. They have been labeled "young urban professionals." Also in the large cities there exists another population. This group moved to the city to take advantage of the unskilled and semi-skilled labor jobs in the manufacturing industries. Unfortunately, in recent years there have been closings, relocation, and downsizing of large factories which has resulted in increased unemployment among this population (Wilson, 1987). As a result those communities lack financial resources. Hence the urban community contains both middle and lower class groups.

The suburban areas tend to be homogenous and middle class. When the young urban professionals start having children they move from the large cities to the suburbs to purchase a home. These professionals bring their financial resources to the suburbs. The move from urban to suburban locations may also be prompted by a search for community.

The rural areas are small towns that are not connected to the large city. The rural areas tend to be composed of working class citizens that make their living from the agricultural industry. There is a greater sense of community in these areas because of the small population and interdependent nature of their business.

The cultural differences among these metropolitan areas will shape teachers' views of readiness. Inner city teachers may perceive their students as children who lack certain preschool experiences that cause them to be developmentally behind (Clark, 1983). They may believe that these students will benefit from the new experiences in kindergarten (Winfield,

1986). On the basis of on these perceptions teachers may adopt a learning readiness view, which states that all children are ready to learn. In order to become ready for school children need to be exposed to the proper environment. Teachers in the suburbs may perceive their students as children who have attended programs to prepare them for school. These teachers may believe that "extra year " to mature makes a student ready and adhere to the maturationist view of readiness. Teachers in the rural area may view their students as children who have had many experiences in the community and are curious about learning, but have had little exposure to academic tasks. These teachers may view readiness as being prepared for formal schooling, and adopt the school readiness perspective.

Closely tied to metropolitan status is socioeconomic status, because level of income tends to determine where you live. The influence of socioeconomic status on school achievement has been well documented (Clark, 1983). Students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds have lower grades and achieve less in school than students from middle and upper class backgrounds (Knapp & Shield, 1991). The socioeconomic factor has also been examined in conjunction with school readiness. Students from lower income backgrounds begin school less prepared than students from middle and upper income backgrounds. In this study I will examine how students from different socioeconomic backgrounds influence teachers' views of readiness.

Students from middle and upper income backgrounds may have the luxury of attending quality preschools or receiving instruction at home by a parent before attending kindergarten. Thus they will have the experiences needed to be successful in kindergarten. Thus teachers may assume that they are academically ready for school. However, they may not be emotionally or

socially ready for school, and their teachers may suggest that they wait a year to enhance their chance of success in school (Harvey & Slatin, 1975). This view will be based in the maturationist view of readiness. Students from working and lower class backgrounds may lack the essential learning experiences to be successful in school (Miller, 1968). Thus teachers may concentrate on providing those experiences based on a belief in learning readiness.

Race is generally the most salient diversity actor. In fact it is racial diversity that concerns the business community most as we approach the year 2,000. Therefore, it is important that we examine the impact of minority students on teachers' views of readiness and their practice.

Much like metropolitan status and socioeconomic status, teachers create perceptions of students based on race. The teacher expectation literature is replete with examples of different perceptions of students' ability based on race (Dusek & Joseph, 1983; Good, 1987; Jussim, 1986). Unfortunately, teachers form these perceptions about students at the kindergarten level. Kindergarten teachers may perceive minority children as less able because of their home experiences. They may believe that their home experiences have not prepared them for school and their home routines are different from the routines used in school. Thus they believe that these children will need intense exposure to routines (Cecil, 1988; Deitz & Pukey, 1969). This belief may be rooted in the school readiness theory.

On the other hand teachers may react very differently to a class of non-minority children. They may perceive these children as prepared for school, based on the wealth of experiences they have had before coming to school. The only potential readiness problem for these students may be lack of maturity. Therefore, these teachers, may tend to believe that in

maturationist theory that states that time is the best gift for these children.

Summary

The school system will be faced with children from various backgrounds and it will be forced to accommodate these students. We can no longer adopt a one size fits all model of education. We need research that shows which methods are best for different students and we need to train teachers to use these methods. In order to accomplish this task we have to make sure teachers have a thorough understanding of the needs of various populations. This study will examine their understanding of the term readiness. I expect that the results of this study will show the diversity of teachers' beliefs due to the social settings.

Method

Sample. The sample consists of 1,339 kindergarten teachers from across the country. These teachers taught regular, developmental, and transitional kindergarten. These teachers were from a sample of 860 schools taken from a listing compiled by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). The sample was divided into categories based on school size, region, and metropolitan status. Then each category was further divided by enrollment size, socioeconomic status, and number of minority students. In this sample 47% of the schools had enrollments of less than 500. The kindergarten class size for the 46% of the sample was 20 to 25. Most of the schools were located in the city (32%) or on the fringe of the city (25%). This sample had slightly more schools from the West (31%) than any other region. Most kindergartners (40%) in this sample are attending schools where the poverty level is 50% or more. However many of the kindergarten classes (36%) have less than 10% minority students. The profile of the typical teacher is a white

female with a degree in early childhood education, and who has been a full-time kindergarten teacher for 5 to 10 years.

Questionnaire. Public School Kindergarten Teachers' Views on Children's Readiness for School (NCES, 1993) is a 17 item fast response survey developed by NCES. This survey was developed in order to measure school readiness for the year 2,000 goal "all children will start school "ready to learn." The survey has three scales. The first scale was the public school teachers' judgments and beliefs about readiness. In this section of the survey teachers were presented with a list of statements about readiness such as **Attending preschool is very important for school success in kindergarten**. They were asked to indicate to what extent they agreed with the statement on a scale from 1 to 5, 1 = **strongly disagree** and 5 = **strongly agree**. The next scale is the teacher is a list of characteristics that teachers believe are important in determining readiness. The list contained indicators such as **Is physically healthy, rested, and well-nourished**. Teachers responded on a scale from 1 to 5, 1 = **not at all important** and 5 = **essential**. The next scale asks to teachers about their classroom practice. In this section teachers were given a list of activities such as **Running, climbing, jumping, and other gross motor activities**. They were asked to state how often they engaged in the activity on a scale from 1 to 4, 1 = **never** and 4 = **5 days a week**. The last section of the survey requested information on teachers' backgrounds. Specifically respondents were asked about their education, teaching experience, and racial identity. This study focused on the teachers' views of readiness scale.

Results

In this study I examined kindergarten teachers' views of readiness. This survey contained a scale measuring teachers' views of readiness. I examined the sample's beliefs on those items.

Insert Table 1 about here.

Teachers in the sample agreed (ratings of 4) with the developmentally appropriate views. These views stated that instruction should be determined by the child's level of development and parents or teachers can enhance readiness by providing experiences that build important skills. Overall, the sample was neutral (ratings of 3) on pushing children before they are ready and holding them back. Lastly, the sample disagreed (ratings of 2) with statements that advocated academic instruction for kindergartners. Overall their beliefs were consistent with the developmentally appropriate practice guidelines established by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 1986).

I wanted to test the three theoretical definitions of readiness found in the literature. Thus I ran a factor analysis on the items in the teachers' views scale. I asked for three factors to correspond to the three definitions. A perusal of the items revealed that there were many items consistent with school readiness and only a few items consistent with maturational readiness. Thus the only rule I imposed was that each factor should contain a minimum of three items. I did not establish a maximum limit. The results of the rotated factor analysis are in Table 2.

The results of the factor analysis are consistent with the theoretical definitions in the literature. The school readiness theoretical definition

emphasizes academic skills as a necessary component for school preparation. Factor 1 contained all the academic skill statements, thus I labeled it school readiness. Factor 2 contained items that emphasized developmentally appropriate experiences as being necessary for school preparation. These items are consistent with the learning readiness definition, which states that all children are ready for school and all they need is the right environment and experiences to continue normal development. I labeled this factor learning readiness. Lastly, factor 3 only contained three items. The items in factor 3 reflected a need to hold children back if they weren't developmentally ready. These items are consistent with the maturational definition, which advocates that children should be held out of school if they are not developmentally ready. I labeled this factor maturational readiness.

I wanted to determine the impact of the social context variables (minority status, metropolitan status, and socioeconomic status) on teachers' views.

Insert Table 3 about here.

I conducted three separate 3-way analyses of variances (ANOVA) one for each factor, to determine if there were significant differences in beliefs.

The ANOVA results on the school factor are in table 4. Each social context variable is significant. In this sample the teachers who have less than 20% white students disagree with school readiness views. The teachers who have greater than 50% poor students in their classes disagree with these views. Lastly, urban school teachers disagree with these views. There are also two significant 2-way interactions present, those teachers in minority poor

and minority urban schools disagree with this view. The 3-way interaction is not significant. The results of the ANOVA on the learning readiness factor are in table 5. The results reveal that there are no significant social context factors. The results of the ANOVA on maturation reveal that teachers who have a majority of white students are divided between being neutral and in agreement with the maturational readiness view. Teachers who teach in suburban schools are divided between being neutral and in agreement with the maturational readiness views. There were no significant interactions.

Conclusion

The results reveal that views of readiness are influenced by social context. In urban, poor, and minority contexts, teachers are rejecting the school readiness view and the academic practices it advocates. A smaller number of teachers in this social setting are adopting learning readiness views. The teachers in middle class, white, suburban schools are leaning toward maturational views of readiness. They express concerns about protecting children from an experience they may not be ready for.

The views may appear different on the surface, but there is an underlying commonality between them. This commonality is a rejection of the academic curriculum in kindergarten. However, the same end can have different means. The inner city teachers' views may lead to changing the curriculum to be more developmentally appropriate. While the suburban teachers' views can lead to changing the child by holding them back or placing them in a special readiness program. Stipek, Daniels, Galluzo, & Milburn (1992) found that middle class parents sent their children to academic private preschools while lower class children attended developmentally appropriate programs such as Head Start. Thus middle class

parents are intentionally preparing their children for academic programs and may even be demanding these programs. In essence, they may want the programs to challenge their children. They may be equating a challenging academic curricula with higher quality education. In some respects the inner city students might receive better preschool education because of the influence of programs like Head Start. The inner city teachers may work closer with these programs and are adapting their mission and goals (which are consistent with learning readiness views). The suburban teachers may not have a link to preschool teachers in the community and are more aligned with the goals and mission of the elementary teachers in their buildings (which are more consistent with school readiness views).

Thus the real social context factors that are significant are the school building environments. These environments determine whether kindergartens are viewed as formal public education programs or early childhood education programs. My recommendation for reaching the readiness goal is to enhance the link between developmentally appropriate preschool programs and public school kindergarten programs.

Table 1

Means of Items on Teachers' Views Scale

ITEM	MEAN	STD DEV
Preschool predicts success in kindergarten	3.5	1.1
Reading/math good for elementary school	2.7	1.3
Parents should teach alphabet at home	2.7	1.2
If unready, wait before kindergarten	3.5	1.3
Child w/readi prblms should be in school ASAP	3.5	1.2
Readiness comes a child grows	4.4	.9
Enhance readiness by providing experience	4.6	.7
Set parental time for child's schoolwrk	3.3	1.4
Homework in kindergarten everyday	2.1	1.3
After kindergarten children ready for 1st	2.5	1.2
Hesitate to send unready children to 1st	3.9	1.1
Communicate with 1st grade teachers	4.3	.8
Parents should read and count at home	4.9	.4
Children should read in kindergarten	2.3	1.1
Read by matching letters and sounds	2.1	1.1
Help to read by reading to children	4.8	.5
Read in kindergarten if show interest	3.2	1.3

Table 2
Rotated Factor Matrix for Teachers' Views of Readiness Scale

ITEM	SCHOOL	LEARN	MATURAT
Reading/math good for el. schl.	.74	-.03	.02
Set time for child's schl. work	.71	.08	-.06
Parents should teach alphabet	.70	-.07	.11
Children should read in K	.65	-.13	-.09
Read by matching letters & sounds	.63	-.19	.05
Preschool predicts success in K	.60	.20	.08
Homework in K everyday	.55	.04	-.15
After K children ready for 1st	.38	-.03	-.27
Read in K if show interest	-.35	.27	.18
Parents should read and count	.04	.57	-.00
Help to read by reading to child	-.18	.54	-.03
Enhance readiness by provid. exper.	.11	.53	-.34
Communicate with 1st grade teacher	.08	.52	-.34
Readiness comes as child grows	-.24	.50	.17
If unready wait before K	-.01	.01	.78
Child w/readi probl. in schl ASAP	.20	.25	-.66
Hesitate to send unready to 1st	.15	.20	.54

Table 3

Means for Social Context Variables

ITEM	SCHOOL 2.71	LEARNING 4.40	MATURATION 3.93
Minority Status*			
less than 20%	2.97 (450)	4.43 (450)	3.77 (450)
20-49%	2.71 (274)	4.41 (274)	3.97 (274)
greater than 50%	2.53 (608)	4.36 (608)	4.04 (608)
Socioeconomic Status**			
less than 20%	2.49 (334)	4.34 (334)	4.07 (334)
20-49%	2.63 (496)	4.39 (496)	4.07 (496)
greater than 50%	2.94 (502)	4.43 (502)	3.80 (502)
Metropolitan Status			
urban	2.94 (425)	4.43 (425)	3.79 (425)
suburban	2.63 (323)	4.37 (323)	4.01 (323)
rural	2.60 (584)	4.39 (584)	3.99 (584)

* Percentage of white students

** Percentage of students who qualify for free and reduced lunch prices

Table 4
ANOVA for School Readiness Views

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig of F
Main Effects	71.469	6	11.911	32.471	.000
Minority	7.897	2	3.949	10.764	.000
Socioeconomic	9.173	2	4.587	12.504	.000
Metropolitan	11.443	2	5.271	15.597	.000
2-way Interactions	11.690	12	.974	2.656	.002
Minority/Socioecon	4.956	4	1.239	3.378	.009
Minority/Metro	5.674	4	1.418	3.876	.004
Socioecon/Metro	2.239	4	.560	1.526	.192
3-way Interactions	4.842	8	.605	1.650	.106

Table 5
ANOVA for Learning Readiness Views

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig of F
Main Effects	2.238	6	.373	2.157	.045
Minority	.147	2	.073	.424	.655
Socioeconomic	.570	2	.285	1.649	.193
Metropolitan	.322	2	.161	.932	.394
2-way Interaction	3.361	12	.280	1.620	.080
Minority/Socioecon	1.156	4	.289	1.672	.154
Minority/Metro	.226	4	.057	.327	.860
Socioecon/Metro	.461	4	.115	.666	.615
3-way Interactions	1.752	8	.219	1.266	.257

Table 6
ANOVA for Maturational Readiness Views

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig of F
Main Effects	27.105	6	4.518	9.568	.000
Minority	5.016	2	2.508	5.311	.005
Socioeconomic	2.367	2	1.184	2.507	.082
Metropolitan	4.458	2	2.229	4.721	.009
2-way Interactions	8.750	12	.729	1.544	.102
Minority/Socioecon	2.921	4	.730	1.547	.186
Minority/Metro	2.347	4	.587	1.243	.291
Socioecon/Metro	.258	4	.064	.137	.969
3-way Interaction	3.378	8	.422	.894	.521

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